



STATE REPRESENTATIVE
JON RICHARDS

WISCONSIN STATE ASSEMBLY

February 2, 2012

To: Chairman Jim Ott, Assembly Committee on Judiciary and Ethics
Committee Members

From: Representative Jon Richards

Re: Support of AB 361

Thank you for holding a public hearing today on Assembly Bill 361, which would remove the statutory exemption for members of the legislature from the state's public records retention law.

I urge you to support this open government legislation.

Wisconsin's public records statutes strongly declare that it is the "public policy of this state that all persons are entitled to the greatest possible information regarding the affairs of government and the official acts of those officers and employees who represent them." (Wis. Stat. § 19.31).

As such, local and state government officials, including the governor and lieutenant governor, are required to comply with strict statutory requirements for retaining public records and making them open to inspection.

The state legislature is likewise subject to the open records law, yet it carved out an exception for itself to the public records retention law. Therefore, state lawmakers are currently free to destroy their public records at any time, so long as an open records request is not pending.

Citizens have a right to monitor and participate in all levels of our government. The legislature's exemption from the state's public records retention law infringes on that right.

Please pass AB 361 to hold the state legislature to the same standards of openness as state agencies, city and village halls, school districts and all other governmental bodies.

Thank you for your consideration.